

# Redefining Combined Arms in Today's Operational Environment

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"Redefining Combined Arms in Today's Operational Environment"

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The current definition of combined arms does not accurately portray the current tactics, techniques, and procedures being utilized in the Global War on Terrorism. There is a paradigm within the United States Marine Corps that ties the definition of combined arms to weapon systems, their munitions, and the ability to employ those weapons in such a manner or sequence that forces the enemy to expose himself to one or more arms<sup>1</sup>. The goal of reaching the point where the Marine Corps can apply its kinetic arms against the enemy so that it can destroy him is still the endstate. However, because of the nature of the current enemy, non-lethal fires or non-kinetic fires are required arms in forcing our enemy to expose himself. Combined arms is now the integration of both kinetic and non-kinetic fires in such a manner that to counteract one arm the enemy is susceptible to another and can be captured or destroyed. A new definition of combined arms would more clearly depict our current fights in Iraq and Afghanistan and would aid in broadening the perspective of our future Marine leaders who will be asked to employ all available arms on the enemy when they go into theater.

### **Background**

The Marine Corps trains its leaders to be familiar with the concept of combined arms in order to instill the skills and abilities necessary to succeed on the battlefield. By the time

a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps graduates from The Basic School (TBS) he or she has been inundated with instruction and exercises geared towards the practice of utilizing all available weapons in order to place the enemy in an unmanageable situation. This is with good reason; the concept of combined arms is one of the Marine Corps' fundamentals in conducting warfare. MCDP-1 Warfighting states that, "Combined arms is the full integration of arms in such a way that to counteract one, the enemy must become vulnerable to another."<sup>2</sup> MCDP-1 goes on to say that we achieve combined arms by utilizing different units and weapon systems that compliment each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The aforementioned current definition of combined arms is a valid concept that has merit, but it lacks the full integration of the Marine Corps' capabilities required in today's operational environment and the global war on terrorism. The unconventional enemy that the United States fights today, attacks and operates asymmetrically, which at times mitigates the ability to combine arms on the enemy in the conventional manner described in Marine Corps doctrine. Conventional arms means combining weapon systems that are kinetic such as the methodology and exercises found during a common Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Center (MAGTFTC) in Twenty-nine Palms, California.<sup>3</sup> The current

operating environment requires a new definition of the combined arms concept that still alludes to the conventional application of arms against a conventional enemy but accounts for the importance of non-kinetic fires in surfacing and identifying the unconventional foe.

In a more conventional war than the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, a common goal of commanders is to mass fires on a canalized enemy formation with the hopes of achieving combined arms. Because U. S. military forces are not facing large mechanized or dismounted forces trying to attain conventional objectives, achieving combined arms with various weapons is still a goal, but there are fewer opportunities to achieve it. The enemy terrorists utilize guerrilla warfare tactics while seeking to remain concealed within urban environments. Because of their evolving tactics and techniques the challenge has become to identify, locate, and then quickly act in order to corner and defeat the enemy with our conventional combined arms.

In order to counter the unconventional enemy, combined arms must be the full integration of all arms, both kinetic and non-kinetic, in such a manner that surfaces and places the enemy at the horns of a dilemma. By redefining combined arms appropriately Marines will receive training to make tactical and operational decisions that meet the challenge of today's enemy.

Understanding that combined arms is not just crew served weapons and tanks fired in concert with indirect fires and close air support is a paradigm shift that needs to be learned and understood by all Marine leaders. Although only a small change in definition, the effect on training young Marines and leaders will be profound.

Through the development of Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs), Marine and Army forces fighting in Iraq have determined that the best way to locate and identify enemy insurgents is through the employment of non-kinetic arms. Non-kinetic arms such as information operations, the use of Human Exploitation Teams, and the Combined Action Program (CAP) have proven to be effective against current guerrilla warfare tactics. As important as our kinetic weapons are, the listed non-lethal fires or means are the arms of the Marine Corps arsenal that are enabling Marines to close with and destroy the enemy.

### **Information Operations**

The inclusion of information operations as a non-lethal combined arm is especially relevant not only because of the fleeting information and rapid intelligence cycles, but because of the readily available technology and the nature of the enemy. In fighting a war against guerrilla tactics in the past, we have found that winning control of the local population is paramount

and the same can be said of current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The importance of the local population was echoed by sentiments made to retired Lieutenant General V. H. Krulak by North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap when he said, "Without the people, we have no information, they hide us, protect us, feed us and tend to our wounded."<sup>4</sup> Information operations are a critical means of influencing and controlling the population that the insurgents operate within. By definition, information operations are "actions taken to influence, affect, or defend information, information systems, and decision-making."<sup>5</sup> The core, supporting, and related capabilities of information operations all have had an impact. In Iraq, psychological operations and civil-military operations have demonstrated success in identifying the enemy and serving as critical non-kinetic fires within the combined arms concept.

As a part of the combined arms effort Psychological Operation (PSYOPS) teams in Iraq are targeting the local population and the insurgents in order to create an environment that is difficult for insurgents to operate in. The goal of PSYOPS is to influence the attitudes and perceptions of the targeted audience in order to convey two basic themes. The two themes are that the "guerrilla insurgents are bad for Iraq's future, and the United State's temporary military presence can best help build Iraq's future."<sup>6</sup> Utilizing leaflet distribution,

regular messages on outlets such as radio news station Radio Nahrain (96 FM), and dissemination through local council or religious leadership, PSYOPS teams proliferate a positive message and a means for the local population to report insurgent activities.<sup>7</sup> The PSYOPS effort coupled with an effective feedback analysis loop reduces the insurgents' ability to communicate and operate covertly and enable military kinetic fires.

A related information operation capability, civil-military operations plays an important role in supporting other information operations in determining and locating the enemy and their activities. Of all the information operations that can be brought to bear against the enemy in terms of combined arms integration, civil-military operations sounds like the least likely candidate. However, A key component to success is gaining the trust and respect of the local populace in contact with the enemy and can aid the U. S. military effort. Through a number of civil-military operations Marine and Army units are forging relationships that are symbiotic and assist greater information operation goals.

The basic goal of civil-military operations is to rebuild and improve local infrastructure and foster trust in the U. S military. In Iraq and Afghanistan, schools and medical facilities are being built in order to improve the quality of



life. A natural side effect is that U. S. forces gain a measure of trust and loyalty by such actions. This trust leads to better information and responsive assistance from tribal leaders and civilians and less support for the insurgents.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, a highly developed relationship between locals and U. S. forces creates an uncomfortable environment for terrorists and it creates opportunities for the application of other arms on the enemy.

### **Human Exploitation Team Employment**

HUMINT (human intelligence) Exploitation Teams (HETs) have been used within the Marine Corps throughout its deployment in Iraq and it is incumbent upon the Marine Corps training establishment to ensure that their mission and capabilities are understood within the context of combined arms employment. By their design and training, the mission of the HET is to identify and manipulate the network of the enemy through the interaction and infiltration of the local populace. Working in conjunction with conventional Marine rifle companies or on their own, they have served with success as an arm that can identify the enemy and make him susceptible to other arms.

Utilizing their expertise and capability, HETs were an invaluable tool in predetermining the whereabouts of the insurgents and their weapons caches during recent operations in Fallujah, Iraq. Operating as a part of TEAM SAMURAI from 7

November to 3 December 2004, two HETs were attached to Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines during Operation Phantom Fury. This recent operation placed the HETs in the "third block" of the war, meaning high intensity conflict.<sup>9</sup> Working side by side with a rifle company that was kicking down doors, conducting hasty attacks on buildings, and clearing room to room, HETs followed in trace and developed the situation by extracting information on the enemy from the local populace or from other subjects and exploiting sensitive sites.<sup>10</sup> HET efforts during Operation Phantom Fury led to the identification of previously undetermined insurgent locations and the application of combined arms attacks on those targets.

In addition to large-scale operations such as Phantom Fury, HETs continue to participate in small unit patrols and act autonomously in order to gain a foothold within the local population and establish a network of informants.<sup>11</sup> HETs act covertly and overtly, facilitate informant communication, and make the required business deals to surface insurgent activity and location. It is through their interaction with local Iraqis that the HETs determine the next viable target for the conventional forces. In best-case scenarios, a HET may identify an insurgent stronghold that can be targeted by all available arms utilizing the fundamentals of combined arms employment. At

minimum, HETs often determine a new location or person worth searching.

HETs are a proven asset that adds to the combined arms effort by cornering the enemy and removing his cloak of concealment within the population. Uncovering targets in a war against an enemy that utilizes guerrilla tactics is a challenging task and it cannot ordinarily be done through conventional kinetic fires in environments such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Instead, the employment of capable HETs can be used as a weapon against the enemy that enables the use of conventional fires.

#### **Combined Action Program Employment**

The Combined Action Program (CAP) serves as a non-kinetic arm by refusing the enemy insurgents concealment options within the local Iraqi population. Of all the non-kinetic arms or fires discussed to this point, the employment of combined action platoon may seem the most abstract because it is a tactic rather than an asset. Developed during the Vietnam War to target the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) who took advantage of the rural villagers, CAP found some success in that high intensity conflict. Because some of the circumstances surrounding the plight of the insurgent and his asymmetric tactics are similar in Iraq, there is reason to believe that CAP

can be successful in surfacing insurgents to be prosecuted by kinetic fires in Iraq.

CAP is a tactical measure that shares the goals of both information operations and HET employment and facilitates the location and identification of targets while providing local security for the population. Used during the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1971, CAP called for the integration of a squad of Marines and one Navy Corpsman into the life and daily activity of an "at risk" village.<sup>12</sup> Because the CAP called for a small unit to occupy a village, work alongside the villagers, and simultaneously provide security for the villagers, a level of trust and community developed between the village and the occupying force. The villagers surely would have rather lived in peace without the NVA or VC, but during wartime they preferred the U. S. Marines. When executed well, CAP created a symbiotic relationship whereby the Marines provided stability and security and the villagers provided information on the enemy or at least a vantage point from where Marines could better develop the situation against the enemy over a long period of time.<sup>13</sup>

CAP can be successful in Iraq because the vast majority of Iraqi people desire stability much like the South Vietnamese villagers did. Like information operations, a desired endstate is to win the hearts and minds of the local population while

creating an operating environment that is less permissive for the terrorist insurgents. Having lost the ability to move and conduct guerrilla operations in a specific area the insurgents have to choose between fighting more conventionally or moving elsewhere. Through training towards CAP employment, as a non-kinetic arm, Marine small units can put the enemy in an environment where they can no longer conceal themselves and are susceptible to other available arms.

### **Conclusion**

Redefining combined arms is necessary in order to shift our ideas from a narrow view to an all-encompassing view where all of a forces' assets are brought to bear in order to destroy an enemy. The U. S. military now finds itself in a fight in which it must adopt a new approach within the battle-space and in training in order to achieve tactical and operational results in the current operational environment. Non-kinetic fires enhance the ability to employ kinetic fires by removing the enemy's ability to conceal himself through the use of information operations, HETs, and tactics such as the CAP. The lessons learned from veteran units flow back to the training installations of the Marine Corps point towards a new understanding and employment of combined arms. These lessons learned have been tried and battle tested by innovative Marines against a savvy and elusive enemy. As a progressive force, the

Marine Corps should lead the way by training the next generation of leaders to understand a new definition of combined arms that accounts for the dynamic and multitude of arms that can be brought to bear against the current enemy.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Government, *MCDP-1 Warfighting* (Washington D. C.: Dept of the Navy, USMC, 1997), 94.

<sup>2</sup> United States Government, *MCDP-1 Warfighting* (Washington D. C.: Dept of the Navy, USMC, 1997), 94.

<sup>3</sup> United States Government-Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, *Fire Support Team Techniques and Procedures Handbook* (MAGTF Training Center, Twenty-nine Palms, Ca: MAGTFTC, USMC, 2003), 1.

<sup>4</sup> GEN V. H. Krulak, quoted in Robert J. O'Neill, *General Giap, Politician and Strategist* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia Ltd., 1969).

<sup>5</sup> United States Government, *Marine Air Ground Task Force Information Operations*, MCWP 3-40.4 (Washington D. C.: Dept of the Navy, USMC, 2003), 3-1.

<sup>6</sup> Emery, Norman, Major (USA), "Information Operations in Iraq," *Military Review*, May-June 2004, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Emery, Norman, Major (USA), "Information Operations in Iraq," *Military Review*, May-June 2004, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Emery, Norman, Major (USA), "Information Operations in Iraq," *Military Review*, May-June 2004, 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> McNulty, A. J., Captain (USMC), "After Action Report For Operation Phantom Fury," Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, 04 December 2004, 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> McNulty, A. J., Captain (USMC), "After Action Report For Operation Phantom Fury," Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, 04 December 2004, 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Dunnigan, James, "Running Informer Networks in Iraq," 23 July 2004, <http://www.strategypage.com/dls/articles.asp> (8 January 2005) 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> "Personal Experiences with the Combined Action Program in Vietnam", *Center of Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO)*, 2004. <http://www.ceto.quantico.usmc.mil> (25 November 2004) 1.

<sup>13</sup> "Personal Experiences with the Combined Action Program in Vietnam", *Center of Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO)*, 2004. <http://www.ceto.quantico.usmc.mil> (25 November 2004), 1-3.

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